



CLEAR MIND



The Newsletter of Madison Vipassana, Inc. Madison, WI

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So in our meditation and insightful understanding of the way things are, we see that beauty, refinement, pleasure are impermanent conditions - as well as pain, misery and ugliness. If you really understand that, then you can enjoy and endure whatever happens to you.

Actually, much of the lesson in life is learning to endure what we don't like in ourselves and in the world around us; being able to be patient and kindly, and not make a scene over the imperfections of the sensory experience.

By Ajahn Sumedho,
from *Mindfulness: the Path to the Deathless*

Ginny Morgan Residential Retreat, October 9-12



We are extremely pleased to welcome Ginny Morgan back to Madison to lead a residential retreat at Pine Lake in Westfield, WI. Ginny has come to lead our practice a number of times and she is always inspiring and loveable. We hope

you'll be able to attend the retreat in order to benefit from her deep practice and study.

The retreat will be suitable for beginning or experienced meditators. The cost for the retreat is \$235 which covers room and board (double rooms) and vegetarian meals, teacher transportation and other retreat expenses. There are a limited number of single rooms available for a higher retreat fee of \$362.50. There are also a limited housing for retreatants with families/children. Contact Cindy at 608-255-4559 to discuss the options for retreatants with children. Childcare will not be provided. In keeping with Theravada Bud-

dhist tradition, there is no charge for the teachings; however, a donation (dana) to the teacher is encouraged.

To register, complete the form on the insert and mail it as instructed on the form. The registration form for the retreat is an insert in this newsletter or available on our website at www.vipassana.net/ retreats To discuss special needs or registration, contact julie-meyer@tds.net. We have limited scholarship funds available. Please contact Laura at 608-238-7376 for details about the scholarship fund and to discuss your situation. We encourage you to register early to be certain of a spot.

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Picnic for Madison Insight Meditation Group & SnowFlower Buddha Sangha on August 2

On Saturday, August 2nd, from 11 am- 3 pm you are invited to a picnic for the members Madison Insight Meditation Group/Madison Vipassana, Inc. and the SnowFlower Buddha Sangha of Madison. As many of you know, SnowFlower Buddha Sangha practices in the Zen tradition based on the teachings of the Vietnamese monk, Thich Nhat Hahn, himself a teacher and inspiration to many of the teachers we bring for retreats. Many SnowFlower folks have attended Madison Vipassana, Inc. retreats and several of us have attended, and even led, at their weekly meetings. This will be a great opportunity to socialize with others on the Buddha's path.

The event will take place from 11:00 to 3:00 at the Marshall Park shelter on Lake Mendota. The picnic is a brown bag lunch, but people are also invited to bring an item to share. To get to the Marshall Park shelter, take University Ave to Allen Blvd. Turn right onto Allen and right again to enter into the parking lot. Go up the hill toward the water to get to the shelter.

Half-Day Sittings

Half-day sittings will resume in October. Check the website at www.vipassana.net/weekly or contact Dave at 608-238-1234 for exact dates and locations.



Madison Vipassana, Inc., Introductory Meditation Classes

Madison Vipassana, Inc. has had a wonderful response to the introductory meditation series we held in spring and again in summer 2008. The 4-week series "Training the Mind" will be offered again in fall from October 25-November 15, 2008, and again in winter from January 21-February 20, 2009.

Training the Mind: The Skill of Meditation offers an introduction to the practice of meditation in the context of the the foundational teachings of the Buddha on the four noble truths, the eightfold path, and the three characteristics. The series of four, two-hour classes

is intended to be practical and experiential.

Students are expected to attend all four sessions and practice during the week in order to benefit and apply the new strategies and skills presented during the prior class. The teaching and content of the class will be cumulative, so attending the entire series will be of most benefit.

No prior experience or knowledge is necessary to enroll. The class is offered on a 'dana' (generosity) basis. The classes are on Saturday mornings, from 9-11 am each week.

The fall classes will be co-led by Jan Sheppard and Diana Grove. They will be held at 9638 Shadow Ridge Trail, the same location as the regular Tuesday night sitting. Directions are at www.vipassana.net/weekly at the entry for the Tuesday night sitting.

To register for the class, send an email indicating your interest, full name, email, phone number and address, to: uppekha@yahoo.com Questions about the class can be directed to Jan at 608-829-0944 (after 6pm if a weekday).

Madison Insight Meditation Group (MIMG)

Sunday Night Sitting Returns to 6-8 PM

Beginning on September 7th the MIMG Sunday night meditation will change back to meeting from 6 to 8 p.m. You may remember that this had been our standard meeting time, but had been changed to 7 p.m. last fall to accommodate the construction at First Unitarian Society (FUS). The FUS building is nearing completion (come check it out in the fall), so we can return to our earlier starting time.

The MIMG steering group considered whether to continue starting at 7pm or returning to the 6 pm start time. In speaking with attendees, there were supporters of both start times, but the Steering Committee felt there was a slight edge to those wanting the earlier time of 6-8 pm.

Our group will continue to meet in the "hearth room" at the back of the auditorium unless a change is posted on the door. This space accommodates our size well. Please remember there is no carpet in this room to cushion the legs and ankles of the floor sitters. You may want to bring a zabuton (stuffed floor cushion) or a folded blanket to make your sittings more comfortable.

Our gratitude to The First Unitarian Society for continuing to allow us to use their space even during the construction. The First Unitarian Society has housed MIMG Sunday sittings without charge to our organization since it first began in 1995! Dana donations to FUS can be made in the envelope available on Sunday nights.

Activities of MIMG

Sunday Weekly Meditation

7-9 pm until 9/7/08, then switching to 6-8 pm, 900 University Bay Drive, Madison
2nd Sunday each month: 6-8 pm, Introduction to Meditation
1st, 3rd, 5th Sunday each month: 45 minute meditation followed by talk and discussion.
2nd, 4th Sunday each month: 45 minute sitting meditation, 20 minute walking meditation, 45 minute sitting meditation

Tuesday Weekly Meditation

6:30-8:15 pm, 9638 Shadow Ridge Trail, Middleton.
45 minute meditation followed by facilitated Dhamma discussion.

Email list:

to subscribe sign up at our homepage at www.vipassana.net or send an empty message to mimg-suscribe@yahoo.com For details on any of these activities email uppekha@yahoo.com

Stepping Back

from *Meditations 3*

by Thanissaro Bhikkhu

(complete talk available online at: <http://www.accesstoinsight.org/lib/authors/thanissaro/meditations3.html#stepping>)

When you meditate, it's easy to get frustrated. Here you are, looking at the breath, and as Ajaan Lee says, "Just four concentrations, and you can't master them." The mind keeps slipping off, and no matter how determined you are to stay with the breath, you find yourself someplace else. Often it doesn't seem like the meditation's heading in any particular direction — just kind of mucking around — and you wonder, "What does this have to do with the Deathless? What does this have to do with true happiness?" That's when it's time to step back and look at the larger perspective.

The big issue of course is your mind. No matter where you live, no matter where you go, you've got the mind right there ... If you have enough mindfulness to pull yourself out of your thought worlds, you're safe. If you have enough mindfulness to pull yourself out of *anything* the mind does, you're safe.

We talk about the mind clinging, the mind hanging on to things, but it doesn't have hands to cling. When it "clings to something" it just keeps thinking about it over and over and over again, it keeps wanting it over and over and over again. To let go of the clinging means that you just let it stop. And the only way you can let it stop is to get out of it and see it simply as an event in the mind.

The last time I went to visit with (continued on p. 3)

Reflections on Phillip Moffitt's *Dancing With Life*

by Lori Creswell

I recently finished reading Phillip Moffitt's new book, *Dancing With Life*. (Rodale, Inc. 2008). In it, Moffitt closely examines the Four Noble Truths and the relationship between suffering and happiness. There were many parts of the book that inspired or informed me, but ego renunciation practices he suggested have particularly stayed in my mind and heart.

Moffitt acknowledges the importance of a healthy ego, but he suggests much of our suffering comes about because the ego sees suffering as a personal failure and feels humiliated. The ego mistakenly believes that the opposite of suffering is happiness and that winning in life, or success in life, means no suffering. To help explore this role of the ego, he suggests three practices that help loosen the ego's grasp. I've gotten a lot out of working with these practices. Let me share them with a little of my personal reflection.

1. The first practice is to renounce your attachment to being right. As so with so much of

mindfulness practice, I find that just noticing how often I want to be right helps me loosen the grip "being right" has on me. And I notice it a lot. I've found it coming up in daily interactions with people in small ways. My partner misunderstands what I've said and I observe an urge to make sure he knows that this is HIS fault, not mine. Noticing this urge allows me to gently release it and just be satisfied with the fact that we have cleared up the misunderstanding. I've also found this helpful to notice in others—when I see that someone is attached to being right it is easier for me to just let that be okay. I notice compassion arising for that person because I know how my own need to be right causes me to suffer. Of course the bigger the issue, the harder it is for me to let go. And I find that political points of view are especially challenging—I find the mind saying "But this time I really AM right!"

2. A second practice is to give up on being the star of your own movie. Moffitt says you definitely

have a role in your movie—but don't always make yourself the star. Move that camera around and see the scene from multiple perspectives. I've found this reminder helpful at times when I am hurt by some perceived slight of another towards me. I recognize that I don't really understand all of the causes and conditions that resulted in their words or actions or even what their intention was in behaving in a certain way. Often I am able to accept that whatever has occurred may actually have very little or nothing to do with me—I'm really not the star!

3. The third practice is to no longer measure the success of your life by how many of your wants are met. Okay, I get this one when it comes to large material possessions—my success is not measured by how big my house is or what kind of car I drive. And I am retired, so many of the achievement issues of a career are no longer relevant. Yet, sure enough, these desires for material comforts and for recogni-

tion and acclaim show up in more subtle ways in my life. Moffitt suggests that:

"(t)his renunciation allows you to still have desires, but they're not the center of your life. You fulfill those wants that can be fulfilled while living from your deepest values, and you slowly abandon the rest. This means that your sexual desires are constrained by non-harming, material gains are limited by ethical and generous behavior, and your ego need for achievement and attention is less of a priority than living according to your core values." (p. 128-129)

Living from your deepest core values, he suggests, is what gives life real meaning, not having your desires met. Hmm...lots of room for me to practice with this one!

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Ajaan Suwat before he passed away, he commented that his brain was sending him all sorts of weird messages, and he'd learned that he had to put a question mark after everything that came into his mind. "But," he said, "that *thing* I gained from the practice: That hasn't gone away." That *thing* was what enabled him to pull out of those messages in order to see that they were strange, weird messages, and that he didn't have to believe them. He had a foundation, so even as the brain was churning out weird perceptions, he had access to a dimension where he

didn't have to get involved.

As we meditate, we're working in the direction of that dimension. The first step is to establish a safe place through concentration to keep our awareness based, a place where it's protected. And that's worth all kinds of effort, all kinds of discouragement, all the things we have to go through in order to get there, because the real sense of solidity and safety that comes with that is more than you can imagine. ... Even awakened people have to age,

grow ill, and die, but they've found the dimension that doesn't age, doesn't grow ill, doesn't die.

And how did they find it? By doing what we're doing right now. Every time a thought comes up, here's your chance: Are you going to fall for the thought or are you going to step back from it? ...We need to learn to appreciate our ability to step back and get some perspective, to pull ourselves out of our thought worlds. No

matter how fleeting your stepping out may seem as you're practicing, each time you do it you're strengthening the skillful habit in the mind, the habit that's actually your path.

Ajaan Maha Boowa tells of how when Ajaan Mun passed away, he was really hit with a sense of despair: What was he going to do with his life now? When issues came up in his meditation, to whom would (continued on back)

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This newsletter is published periodically to inform our meditation community of activities and events of interest. This newsletter and other information is also published on our website at: <http://www.vipassana.net>

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he go for help? He said he felt like someone who'd been depending on a doctor for long years and now the doctor was gone. ... But then he remembered all the teachings he'd gotten from Ajaan Mun in the past. Those would have to be his teachers now. And what was the point that Ajaan Mun emphasized more than anything else? "Whenever anything comes up in your mind that you're not sure about, just step back and stay with that sense of the knower, that sense of just basic awareness, and no matter what, whatever it is in the mind will pass and you'll be safe." It seems like such a little thing, just the sense of the watcher, the observer, but it can keep you safe, because it's the faculty of the mind that can pull you out. Even when storms are blowing through the mind, you're in a

safe spot. You've got your haven right here. Just don't let yourself get pulled into the storms, because they can blow you all over the place. ... If you *do* step back, though, you find that you're strengthening a very important habit. Each time you remember to come back builds a pathway in the mind.

When you come to meditate in a place like this, it's as if you've got your nose above water, you've pulled yourself out a little bit from the flood. That's what they call it — "the flood": all these things that come pouring out of the mind. If you're not careful, they can totally immerse you. You can drown. But here you've got your nose above water. You can breathe. It may not yet be the most stable position, but the Buddha says that it can become your island. You've got

your island in the midst of the flood here. It may not be a big island, but it's big enough. As you develop it, it opens up to even better things in the mind.

Without this sense of awareness, what would you have? Nothing. Nothing to hold onto at all. You'd be swept around in the storms that the mind cooks up. With this, though, you have hope — and it's not a far-off hope. It's something right here. If you learn how to value it, it'll open up and show you all it has to offer — more than you can imagine. It's like one of those fairy tales where there's the troll under the bridge who, as it turns out, has gold stashed away. The valuable things in life are often in the places where you'd least expect to find them, and they're closer to home than you might think.

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